United Nations CEDAW/C/SR.1225

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
15 August 2014

English only

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Fifty-eighth session

Summary record of the 1225th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 7 July 2014, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Neubauer (Vice-Chairperson)

Contents

General discussion on girls' and women's right to education

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Editing Section, room E.5108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.14-07826 (E) 130814 150814

1407826

Please recycle

In the absence of Ms. Ameline, Ms. Neubauer, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

General discussion on girls' and women's right to education

Welcoming remarks

1. **The Chairperson** said that although the idea of elaborating a general recommendation on girls' and women's right to education had first been endorsed in July 2012, the Committee had not managed to adopt a concept note until February 2014 because of the large number of recommendations in the pipeline. The number of responses received from stakeholders showed that enthusiasm for the recommendation was shared outside the Committee. Throughout the Committee's history, concerns over the various components of girls' and women's right to education, as enshrined in article 10 of the Convention, had been raised repeatedly in dialogues with States parties, in concluding observations and in general recommendations. The recommendation would be instrumental in guiding States parties in meeting their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to education of women and girls.

Opening remarks

2. **Ms. Pillay** (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that, in recent decades, the international community had largely reached consensus on the importance of available, accessible, acceptable and high-quality education as the route to women's empowerment, and on the need to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of education. As the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals was approaching, there had been a general reduction in gender disparity in schools, one of the targets of the Goals; however that trend masked the pockets of shocking inequalities in a number of States and regions where women were still underemployed, underpaid and otherwise undermined in fields ranging from personal autonomy to participation in politics, and continued to carry unequal domestic burdens and endure great violence. The continuing imbalance of power between the sexes in the public domain underscored the fact that education had not significantly addressed the strategic needs of women as a group, partly due to entrenched patriarchal systems and harmful gender stereotypes.

3. The primary concern must be to advance the right to education in order to facilitate the rights and strategic needs of girls and women; to encourage educational institutions to eliminate harmful stereotypes regarding the traditional roles of women and men; to promote girls' right to make free choices about their fields of study and careers; and to further girls' enjoyment of rights in their personal lives and in political and economic domains. As two thirds of the over 35 million girls not in school were from minority groups, continuous efforts were required to ensure that all girls attended school. Many were excluded because of economic disadvantage, location or personal status. Girls were far more likely than boys to perform hours of unpaid work in the home and less likely to be enrolled in school. Parents, teachers and counsellors often did not support girls' academic participation vigorously, which made it more likely that they would drop out. Even inside schools, girls could find themselves subjected to violence or harassment and have a pervasive sense that they did not belong there.

4. An effective response to such challenges must build on a human rights approach, engaging all stakeholders in the educational process, including government officials, teachers and administrators, parents and community leaders. The right to education should embrace the rights within education, i.e. human rights should be embedded in all processes and personnel of the education sector, and through education, i.e. girls should be learning personal and leadership skills that promoted effective participation in public life.

5. She cited an advocate for women's empowerment who once noted that the human race was like a bird with two wings: if one wing was broken, no one could fly. The failure to respect the right of girls and women to education violated their rights as human beings and, furthermore, breaking one of the two wings that kept societies moving forward held everyone back.

6. **Mr. AlMuzaini** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), speaking on behalf of the Director-General, said that UNESCO was fully engaged in the process of elaborating the general recommendation. Gender equality was in fact one of two global priorities of the UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy for 2014–2021. In education, gender equality was a basic human right and a precondition for the realization of all other human rights: it empowered girls and women and had a multiplier effect, unlocking other rights, whereas the infringement of other human rights and perpetuation of poverty were compounded by its denial. The general discussion and the general recommendation could not come at a better time given that global discussions on education for the post-2015 development agenda had been intensified. The recommendation should be based on lessons learned, with a view to addressing the systemic and persistent challenges that hampered girls' and women's education. Since a rights-based approach to education depended upon regulatory and institutional coherence, he also called for a uniform and comprehensive legal framework that took into account Education for All goals and the roles of various government departments in achieving those goals.

7. The 2015 Education for All goals, Millennium Development Goal 3 and the newly proposed education targets under the post-2015 development agenda would not be achieved if girls' and women's right to education was not fulfilled. UNESCO stood ready to share its years of experience in promoting, monitoring and implementing the right to education under its Convention against Discrimination in Education and to work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Committee Working Group on Girls' and Women's Education towards the adoption of the general recommendation.

8. **Ms. Poirier** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that her organization's new policy towards gender went beyond supporting the achievement of high-quality education for all by emphasizing the need to end gender-based discrimination and address discrimination against women in power structures. That would mean not only ensuring equal access but also developing the capacity of education systems to recognize and address gender-based discrimination and empower girls to participate in decision-making and to claim their right to education.

9. Over half of the 57 million children of primary school age not in school were girls, with significant barriers to primary and secondary education, including curricula and teaching practices that failed to incorporate a gender perspective, gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices and inadequate and unsafe environments, and educational systems that did not reach the most vulnerable and at-risk children, especially those who had dropped out of school. Early marriage and teen pregnancies also represented barriers, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. UNICEF had taken steps under the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative towards the abolition of school fees, girls' scholarships and stipends and advocacy and programming for inclusive education for children with disabilities and poor, indigenous, ethnic and linguistic minority groups.

10. In sub-Saharan Africa, UNICEF had played a major role in advocating for readmission policies to keep pregnant girls and young mothers in school, while the Back to School Campaigns had returned millions of girls to school. Keeping girls in school required parents, community members, educators, policymakers and partners to consider larger gender issues. UNICEF had therefore worked with governments, partners, community leaders and boys to raise awareness about gender stereotypes. Empowerment and inclusion

in education, however, must be based on a comprehensive framework, ranging from early childhood development to second-chance education for school dropouts. UNICEF had also supported corporate mentoring programmes that had enabled girls to make informed career choices and actively participate in the economy by developing competitive skills in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering, mathematics and technology.

Introduction of the general recommendation on girls' and women's right to education

11. **Ms. Bailey**, speaking as chairperson of the Working Group on Girls' and Women's Right to Education, said that article 10 of the Convention had previously been very narrowly interpreted. In most instances, information provided by States parties had focused primarily on the right to education, while they had failed to assess capacity and access to education adequately; periodic reports had often been totally silent on ways in which patriarchal attitudes were entrenched in schools, exposing girls to an environment which could be physically, emotionally and sexually abusive; and, although some 60 million girls per year at or on their way to school had been affected by sexual abuse, the issue often went unreported by States parties, only surfacing in the constructive dialogue when raised by the Committee. Schools could be major contributors to the phenomenon known as hegemonic masculinity and to submissive femininity. Although the Committee had consistently raised questions about inequalities in employment and decision-making, the periodic reports submitted to it often did not draw an explicit link between those inequalities and gender bias in school curricula, textbooks and pedagogic approaches as well as the gender stereotypes that schooling tended to reproduce.

12. Even if improving girls' and women's access to education satisfied a basic human right, it was less successful in shifting their subordinate position in the private and public sphere. Rather than challenging patriarchal structures and systems, schooling all too often reinforced the social order and maintained sex-based discrimination and societal power structures. If education was to be the vehicle for women's empowerment and for a better balance in the distribution of power between the sexes, States parties must give greater attention to all dimensions of schooling.

13. The aim of the general recommendation was thus to address and ultimately eliminate national and regional inequalities preventing women and girls from enjoying the right to education and rights within and through education. It would also establish clear linkages with other articles of the Convention as well as existing general recommendations dealing with related concerns.

Keynote speakers

14. **Mr. Singh** (Special Rapporteur on the right to education) said that everyone was entitled to the right to education, boys and girls alike, and to benefit from it as a means of empowerment through the acquisition of knowledge, values, competencies and skills. All States parties to the Convention were required to respect, protect and fulfil women's rights in the field of education, as covered under article 10.

15. The general recommendation should urge States parties to incorporate international obligations on girls' and women's right to education into their national legal frameworks in accordance with the Convention. It was the responsibility of Governments to develop and implement policies aimed at enabling all women and girls deprived of an education to be able to exercise their rights to high-quality education on an equitable basis. The general recommendation and existing general recommendations and relevant articles of the Convention should also form a nexus of ideas.

16. He fully supported incorporating a human rights-based approach to girls' and women's right to education into the general recommendation, as their education should be

considered a human right rather than as a benefit to them, their family or their society. Governments should also be encouraged to foster a school environment protective of girls' and women's right to education. In addition, the right to education should entail incentives to girls and women to develop their talents and creativity through technical and vocational education. Similarly, while placing literacy for all at the heart of basic education, Governments must devise policies and strategies linking literacy to skills development so as to ensure that literacy programmes would become transformative. The general recommendation should not neglect the concept of rights holders and duty bearers and should focus on the monitoring and accountability mechanisms which were vital for addressing the gap between commitments and reality. Lastly, it should encourage States to guarantee access to justice to ensure that the right to education was duly enforced.

17. **Ms. Godefa** (United Nations Children's Fund) said that girls' education was one of the best investments that a country could make and the defining challenge of the modern age was keeping girls in school. The challenge was considerably more complex than in the past, since targeted attacks on girls, conflicts and disasters were preventing girls worldwide from accessing a good education in safe learning environments. Getting girls into school was only half the battle, while other issues included: addressing the disparities and cumulative effects that poverty and location placed on girls; ending the violence in and around schools; recognizing and tackling sexual abuse in school; understanding parents' fears and helping them to protect their daughters; investing not only in primary but also in secondary schools; and increasing funding to target girls excluded from school. There was a strong link between educating women and girls and positive outcomes for maternal health, economic empowerment and social mobility. Education provided girls and women with a sense of social freedom and human rights and led to more equitable and sustainable development by changing attitudes and building confidence. The general discussion should translate into tangible action: it was up to those present to empower and protect girls and women and encourage leaders to have zero tolerance for the education systems failing women and girls, and to come up with inventive solutions.

18. **Mr. Muñoz** (Plan International) said that Plan International had launched a campaign entitled "Because I am a girl" aimed at affording girls access to education and to the skills they needed to transform their lives and their communities.

19. School access alone did not offer any guarantee of equality in education. On the contrary, gender stereotyping, threats to girls' emotional security and curricula that were insensitive to gender issues directly conspired against the realization of the right to education. The difficulties encountered by girls in accessing education often stemmed from irrelevant learning materials and the absence of a rights-based approach to education. Those difficulties were often aggravated by other types of exclusion linked to disabilities, ethnic or geographical origin and sexual preferences. The framework of inequality and structural discrimination that underlay the processes of socialization and perpetuation of gender stereotypes in many education systems also affected boys, who were usually conditioned or induced to adopt intolerant or overtly violent behaviour patterns.

20. To break with education systems of that kind called for a complete overhaul of societies and cultures in order to encourage men and women to live together on an equal footing. As was evident from article 5 of the Convention, the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women posed the main challenge to identifying new educational and human development policies.

21. Substantive equality would not be achieved simply through the enactment of laws or the adoption of policies which failed to address or even perpetuate inequality between men and women because they did not take account of the existing economic, social and cultural inequalities, particularly those experienced by women. Many of the serious problems

besetting education were not to be found in school systems but in discriminatory environments. That was one reason why certain educational reforms, expected to settle social and economic problems which government authorities had not wanted to tackle, had met with little success. The fact that no country had succeeded in eliminating the gender gap clearly revealed how far educational commitment had fallen short of expectations. It was clear that development had not brought about progress on equality, and inclusion continued to be a privilege.

22. His organization was convinced that the Committee had an important part to play in constructing equal education systems. Girls with disabilities in particular should be given the opportunity to identify their educational, social and cultural needs. There was also a need for States to introduce simple and effective mechanisms to allow children to report any acts of violence committed against them in educational establishments.

23. **Ms. Katsuno-Hayashikawa** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), accompanying her statement with a digital slide presentation, said that the number of girls enrolled in primary education had increased by nearly 40 million since 1999 and that the enrolment of girls in lower secondary education had almost doubled in some regions. The quantitative progress achieved in access to education had been made possible by the enhancement of both legal and policy environments that supported education for women and girls at the national and international levels. The work of the Committee complemented and reinforced the Convention against Discrimination in Education by encouraging States to implement gender-responsive policies and practices aimed at increasing access to and improving the quality of education for women and girls. On the occasion of the eighth consultation of Member States on the implementation of the aforementioned Convention, 40 out of 59 reporting Member States had indicated that they had made an explicit reference to guaranteeing the right to education of women and girls or to prohibiting gender-based discrimination in their Constitution, national legislation or specific policies.

24. Many existing strategies and plans to increase access to education for girls and women were based on the five core principles of the right to education and gender equality, namely: non-discrimination; lifelong learning; high standards of equity and a rights-based approach whereby education should be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable; education that empowered women to participate in the transformation of their communities and societies; and education that facilitated the women's and girls' enjoyment of other social, cultural, economic and political rights. The fact that States had passed laws and developed policies and strategies to achieve that aim showed that they recognized education's potential for transforming the lives of women and girls.

25. However, despite strong political commitment, the latest data on educational trends revealed that there were still many challenges to be overcome before the right of girls and women to education could be fully realized. There were 31 million girls out of school in 2011, 55 per cent of whom were expected never to enrol. In 2011, gender parity had only been achieved in 60 per cent of countries at the primary level and in 38 per cent of countries at the secondary level. Furthermore, women continued to account for two thirds of illiterate adults.

26. Gender inequality in education persisted because barriers to education were not only financial in nature but were also linked to gender-based discrimination driven by social and cultural factors. The increase in incidents of gender-based violence against girls in educational establishments was a growing cause for concern, as it often prevented them from participating in education. Laws and policies aimed at improving access to education for women and girls were not sufficient to ensure the full realization of their right to education. Education's transformative power should be recognized and referred to in the legal and policy frameworks of development sectors such as health, labour and justice to

ensure a coordinated and holistic approach to promoting the right of women and girls to education.

27. **Ms. Khalique** (Teacher of education activist Malala Yousafzai) said that women had been subjected to injustice and unequal treatment for centuries. As a result of gender-based discrimination, many women were deprived of basic human rights, such as the right to education. Girls accounted for the majority of children currently out of school. In Swat District, Pakistan, there were more schools for boys despite the fact that the female population was larger. Most parents were against coeducation. If there was no school for girls in the neighbourhood, girls remained at home. Teenage girls had to be accompanied to school by a male escort. While in developing countries it was socially unacceptable and unlawful for a child not to attend school, in developing countries the opposite was often the case. The Taliban had banned girls from attending school and had blown up many school buildings. Moreover, Taliban leaders used to congratulate girls for having renounced Western education. Talibanization was always successful in patriarchal societies owing to their oppressive treatment of women.

28. Other barriers to girls attending school included poverty, child labour, early marriage, social norms and a lack of basic facilities. Impoverished families that lived from hand to mouth would not think of educating their children. If they could afford to do so, they would send their sons and not their daughters. Many girls were confined to the family home until their parents found them a husband while others performed domestic labour for affluent families. It was quite normal for girls to marry before they had finished school. In Pakistan, social norms did not favour education for girls and women. Many people thought that modern education made girls liberal and vulgar. It was preferable for girls to be obedient and submissive. Education encouraged freedom of thought and gave girls confidence, which men found intolerable.

29. All Governments should adopt legislation to guarantee access to school for all children. Governments also had a duty to provide basic facilities and to ensure the safety of children attending school. Education up to the higher secondary school level should be free and compulsory. In addition, school curricula should broach topics such as gender equality and human dignity.

30. **Mr. Mattar** (The Protection Project, Johns Hopkins University) said that he found article 10 of the Convention to be based on the following core principles: all forms of discrimination must be eliminated to ensure that women and girls received the same quality and type of education and were given the same opportunities to succeed as men and boys; education should be extended beyond the primary and secondary level to all levels, including tertiary, technical and physical education; education should be available and accessible to women and girls living in both urban and rural areas, and to those belonging to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups; the elimination of stereotypical concepts of the roles of men and women in society should be supported by adequate financial resources to allow women and girls to participate in education, and by legislation prohibiting harmful practices such as child labour, child marriage and violence against women; education should facilitate the enjoyment of women's rights in their personal, family, political and public lives.

31. Guaranteeing the right to education was essential for the effective implementation of the entire Convention and in particular articles 6, 15 and 16. Through education, women and girls gained a better understanding of the implications of early marriage, unequal rights and other forms of discrimination against women. Any general recommendation adopted by the Committee should address the five principles outlined above.

32. **Ms. Melchiorre** (Right to Education Project) said that it was only through education that individuals could access and enjoy other human rights, particularly those linked to

personal development, active participation in public life and employment. The violation, denial or distortion of the right to education explained the continuing presence of discrimination, exclusion and disempowerment in the world today.

33. Women and girls who were denied the right to education on the basis of their gender, their economic or social status, or because of the persistence of patriarchal systems, were often led into domestic work, child marriage and early childbearing. Without a good quality education, women and girls faced major difficulties in making their own sexual and reproductive choices and in participating in decisions about family life. The violation of the right to education could also have a detrimental effect on political representation, as illiterate persons, the majority of whom were women, were precluded from standing as candidates in elections. Furthermore, the denial of the right to education often led to the exclusion of women from formal employment, relegating them to the informal sector.

34. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All recognized that education was the key to improving women's health and standard of living, and to increasing their participation in public and political life. Despite the progress achieved by such strategies, the question remained as to why the individual gains achieved by women through education had failed to bring wider gains in the political, economic and social sectors.

35. In order to redress existing discrimination, inequality and injustice, it was necessary to work with those who feared that gender equality would entail the loss of privilege or power and show them that gender equality could bring benefits for all concerned. States should also invest more in secondary and higher education; take measures to keep girls in school; and ensure that the age at which compulsory education ended, the minimum age for marriage and the minimum employment age were coherent and aligned. Secondary education should equip students with skills and training that were relevant to the job market. School curricula should contain a life skills component covering topics such as sexuality, decision-making, rights, gender and power relations. Education was a State responsibility. States should make a clear and firm commitment to allocate the necessary resources to the education of women and girls, which should be reflected in all relevant legal frameworks and policies. While there was no lack of political will to promote the rights of women and girls through education, accountability could only be guaranteed through legal obligations.

Oral statements by stakeholders

36. **Ms. Al-Sada** (Qatar) said that there were still many obstacles to the full realization of the right to education of women and girls, which included poverty, gender stereotyping and a lack of security for women in their communities. To remedy that situation, Governments should enact legislation guaranteeing access to education for women and girls and devise curricula that were tailored to their specific needs. There was also a need for more initiatives to address that problem at the international level.

37. **Mr. Ladois** (France) said that achieving gender equality required girls and boys to be afforded equal treatment in schools and to be given the same opportunities to succeed. While considerable progress had been achieved in providing girls with access to primary education under the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals, around 31 million girls were still not in school. The main obstacles to girls' education included schooling costs, early marriage, a lack of security, sexual violence and gender-based discrimination. Gender-based violence in educational establishments was also a major impediment to girls' education. Gender-based violence could be aggravated by factors such as sexual orientation, social and economic or ethnic background and disabilities. Whether it was sexual, psychological or physical in nature, gender-based violence in educational establishments often went unnoticed and unpunished, which made it

difficult for education authorities to take appropriate action. France would continue to work with UN-Women and UNICEF to combat that phenomenon.

38. **Ms. Košir** (Slovenia) said that greater focus and additional guidance on the right to education would help States parties to meet their obligations under article 10 of the Convention. Noting that education, and especially human rights education, was a key to empowerment, equality, tolerance and the advancement of society as a whole and that women still faced discrimination in employment despite outperforming their male counterparts in education, she urged the Committee to consult the United Nations declaration on human rights education and training and address the role of education in guaranteeing equal employment opportunities when drafting the general recommendation.

39. **Mr. González** (Colombia) said that achieving gender equality in education was one of the six priority areas of social policy in Colombia. The Government was taking specific action to address many of the obstacles, including action to reduce dropout rates, to provide targeted support for disadvantaged girls and women and to attract women into male-dominated occupations such as the military, the police force and medicine.

40. **Ms. Stasinowsky** (Australia) said that the Government of Australia wished to highlight the importance of international law principles in the interpretation of treaty obligations, including the principle that a treaty should be interpreted in good faith in accordance with the ordinary meaning of the terms and in light of its object and purpose. On that basis, it was imperative that the views should include in the general recommendation reflected the interpretation of the relevant obligations as understood by States parties to the Convention and that the approach adopted was consistent with the practices of other United Nations treaty bodies.

41. **Mr. Roekchamnong** (Thailand) said that obstacles to effective implementation of article 10 were often rooted in misconception. The right to equality was often interpreted to mean the right to be treated according to male standards whereas, in truth, there were undeniable differences between men and women that should be given due consideration in all strategies for equality, including equality in education. Noting the interdependence between enjoyment of the right to education and enjoyment of other fundamental rights and freedoms, he called for genuine commitment and action from States parties in order to deliver on the promise of the rights enshrined in the Convention.

42. **Ms. Borg** (Malta) said that female and male students should enjoy the same access to courses, scholarships, grants and continuing education, the same career development support and the same vocational guidance. The Government of Malta had adopted various measures to increase opportunities for women who wished to further their studies, including measures to reduce school dropout rates and the introduction of free childcare and paternal leave to help young mothers.

43. **Ms. Dunlop** (Brazil) said that although the number of Brazilian women who continued their studies at university had risen dramatically and women generally remained in formal education longer than men, women still faced higher unemployment rates and tended to occupy lower-paid, less prestigious jobs. Various education-related goals had been established to address the disparities. The measures adopted in pursuit of those goals were contributing to transformative changes in gender equality and access that were fundamental for the social inclusion of women and men in all aspects of human, social and economic development.

44. **Ms. Govender** (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) said that the development of the general recommendation provided a timely opportunity to reinforce the provisions of article 10 that dealt with health education, specifically education about sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights. AIDS remained the main cause of death among young women in sub-Saharan Africa and young women worldwide had less

comprehensive knowledge about HIV and its transmission than their male counterparts, reflecting the pressing need to address gender inequalities in health education. The general recommendation should therefore emphasize the importance of access to comprehensive, quality education on sexual and reproductive health and State party reports should be monitored for inclusion of that critical dimension.

45. **Ms. Klasing** (Human Rights Watch) said that, in at least 23 countries, schools and universities had been commandeered by military personnel or non-State armed groups, placing girls at risk of harassment, rape and abduction or forcing them to abandon their studies. In the general recommendation, States parties should be encouraged to use the draft Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict as a guide to good practice. Lack of adequate water, sanitation, menstrual hygiene management and the risk of violence in unsafe toilets also had an impact on girls' attendance. The general recommendation should therefore emphasize the importance of access to safe, clean water, sanitation facilities and hygiene materials in schools.

46. **Ms. McKernan** (Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), speaking on behalf of 13 NGOs, said that the recent trend towards privatization had worrying implications for the quality, accessibility and affordability of education. Privatization exacerbated gender discrimination, in that girls' education was not viewed as a worthwhile investment. It also fostered a lack of accountability. Quality free public education was a key to demolishing structural barriers to girls' access to education and it was imperative that education should be seen as a public good, not as a commodity.

47. **Ms. Lois** (Plan International) urged the Committee to provide guidance on early childhood education in the general recommendation, noting that timely, comprehensive, gender-sensitive early childhood care and education was of paramount importance in enabling children, and especially girls, to realize their full potential, building the foundations for gender equality and fostering socially inclusive and equitable societies.

48. **Ms. Lee** (International Disability Alliance) said that the right to education was particularly important for women and girls with disabilities, who were subjected to multiple discrimination. In line with the views of United Nations treaty bodies, including the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which considered inclusive education to be the most appropriate means for States to guarantee universality and non-discrimination in the right to education, the general recommendation should expressly advocate inclusive education, calling for a change in the culture, policies and practices of mainstream schools to ensure appropriate accommodation for all students.

49. **Ms. Thompson** (Global Coalition for Human Rights Education) said that human rights education was a key component of a quality education and that a rights-based education provided a pass key for full and equal enjoyment of all human rights. The general recommendation should encourage States parties to place equal rights for women and girls at the heart of educational strategies, to mainstream gender equality in educational content, to translate human rights into educational strategy and practice and to move beyond equal access to education and equality in education to education for equality.

50. **Ms. Valenza** (International Lesbian and Gay Association) highlighted the need to address institutional discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LBTI) women. Due to rigid societal norms and gender stereotypes, States parties often failed to fulfil their obligations under article 10 in respect of LBTI girls and women, many of whom did not receive comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, including information about the health aspects of sexuality and intersex variations. The general recommendation should encourage States to review discriminatory laws, promote attitude change and guarantee free educational choices and prejudice-free job opportunities.

51. **Mr. Kofmel** (Autistic Minority International) said that self advocates viewed autism not as something to be prevented or cured but as a neurological difference that was as valid as others and that one of the underlying principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was "respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity". The general recommendation should expand on the Committee's brief general recommendation on disabled women in the light of the educational provisions contained in the aforementioned Convention, particularly as they pertained to inclusive education, non-discrimination, equal opportunity, accessibility and individualized support. Educational systems that were inclusive of persons with disabilities would be inclusive of girls and women in general.

52. **Ms. de Lavernette** (International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education) said that the right to education called for a nuanced definition of discrimination which accepted that certain distinctions and, in some circumstances, certain forms of separation were not only legitimate but also necessary. The general recommendation should develop the concept of "qualitative equality", emphasizing the importance of respect for diversity in education.

53. **Ms. Milne** (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children) said that, as the most common form of violence inflicted upon children, corporal punishment was a barrier to accessing education, a source of fear, absenteeism and dropouts, and an impediment to learning. The general recommendation should highlight the human rights imperative of prohibiting corporal punishment in schools and all other settings, and the importance of that prohibition in guaranteeing girls' right to education.

54. **Ms. Awori** (International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific) said that the general recommendation needed to address the political, cultural and social factors that denied girls the right to education and rendered them more vulnerable to poverty, marginalization, abuse and exploitation. States parties should be required to remove all reservations to the Convention that were based on culture or religion and should be held accountable for any measures that prevented girls and women from enjoying the right to education. The general recommendation should highlight the importance of a comprehensive and quality education that, extending far beyond basic schooling, prepared girls for employment, encouraged empowerment and entrepreneurship and included comprehensive instruction in sexuality, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health.

55. **Ms. Thomasen** (Center for Reproductive Rights) drew attention to two pressing issues that undermined the right to education: mandatory pregnancy testing and the expulsion of pregnant schoolgirls, which reinforced the stereotypical belief that girls had sole responsibility for unintended pregnancies; and the lack of comprehensive sexuality education, which prevented girls from exercising reproductive autonomy. States must take immediate action to eliminate discrimination in schools on the grounds of pregnancy and to accommodate the educational needs of pregnant schoolgirls. In addition, to enable girls to attain substantive equality, comprehensive sexuality education should be a mandatory component of educational curricula.

56. **Ms. Mollmann** (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Network) said that members of the LBTI community faced four specific obstacles in education that forced many of them to drop out: gender stereotyping, which fuelled discrimination and abuse; exposure to violence; mandatory gendered dress codes that resulted in sanctions and even expulsion when not respected; and bullying. She urged the Committee to acknowledge the obstacles that LBTI persons faced and include reference to sexual orientation and gender identity in the general recommendation.

57. **Ms. Gella** (European Roma Rights Centre), noting that legal and policy measures had failed to address adequately the negative impact of multiple discrimination and harmful

traditional practices on Roma girls and women, said that the general recommendation should enable States parties to implement the Convention in a way that ensured access to equal, high-quality education for Roma girls and women. States parties should be urged to recognize and respond to the cumulative effects of discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity and other status-determining factors, including their effects on the right to education.

58. **Mr. Hollingdale** (Global Network for Rights and Development) said that the abduction of Nigerian schoolgirls by Boko Haram militants was both a deplorable attack on the victims and part of an uncompromising and intimidating campaign to exclude girls and women from education in general. A firm defence was required as the education of young girls and women was not only a human rights issue for those involved but also a question of development that affected the whole of society. Societies that had greater gender equality and access to decent education for all its citizens tended to be wealthier, happier and healthier than those that discriminated against women and girls and limited access to knowledge.

59. **Mr. Obaidi-Fard** (Organization for Defending Victims of Violence) said that political, religious and racial extremism coupled with cultural disadvantages constituted a major source of inequality and were a huge obstacle to women's education, as had been seen in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, with girls being abducted on the pretext of protecting them from a corrupt education or forced into early marriages on the grounds that their duties lay in the home. In developed countries the number of ethnic minority girls completing high school was also relatively low, reflecting wholesale discrimination in the education system. The general recommendation should address extremism as a barrier to education and the role of education as the ultimate tool for empowering women.

60. **Ms. Stevens** (Sierra Leone) said that the statements attested to the clear and persistent obstacles to enjoyment of the right to education. Country-specific initiatives entailing national action plans and oversight were required to overturn them. Role models should also be used to address cultural attitudes and gender stereotypes and demonstrate the role that educated women and girls could play in society.

61. **The Chairperson**, noting that time constraints precluded the planned question and answer session, assured those present that all issues raised would be examined by the working group and taken into consideration in the drafting process.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.